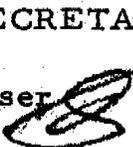


MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY

November 29, 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARY KISSINGER

FROM: W. R. Smyser 

SUBJECT: Has Hanoi Decided on Offensive?


MORI/CDF C03234542

I have asked several Vietnam analysts why recent estimates have stated that Hanoi has not yet decided on a dry season offensive. They replied as follows:

There is no evidence in North Vietnamese public or intercepted material which suggests any tactical dispute or any uncertainty about whether to proceed. Instead, the case for alleged indecision rests on two bases: first, that the North Vietnamese do not have quite enough troops in the Highlands and in the COSVN to provide a substantial reserve for a major offensive; second, the historical experience that the North Vietnamese often do not fully commit themselves to an offensive until they see how the first moves in a potential offensive have gone. The analysts also indicated that there is a measure of bureaucratic protection in the claim for indecision: it makes it easier for an analyst to argue that the North Vietnamese changed their mind after he had made his estimate.

However, I was also told that if infiltration continues along present lines and ultimately goes as high as projected in one sensitive North Vietnamese intercept, Hanoi will have more than enough reserves to launch a major offensive. I was also told that the new route structure is so good that Hanoi does not really need to commit its troops to the South as early as in the past.

The only real question, according to the analysts, is the type of offensive. They doubt that Hanoi will repeat the 1968 or 1972 exercises, but may instead try for the kind of rolling offensive that could "bloody" South Vietnamese forces without generating enough steam to provoke American Congressional support for our involvement. Estimates differ whether the North Vietnamese would really gain much from that kind of operation.

An element of uncertainty, which you can judge better than I, is whether Moscow and Peking have really weighed in firmly. My impression has always been that neither felt free to do so and that the North Vietnamese ultimately heeded no counsel but their own. I am not sure if that still holds in the days of detente.

NSA review
completed

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